

64-76271-10

23 November 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Saigon Station Experiment in Counterinsurgency

REF : Memorandum for DCI from C/FE, Same Subject,
dated 16 November 1964

Upon being informed of plans to distribute this paper outside the Agency, I phoned Mr. Elder and Mr. Helms and objected strenuously on the following grounds:

1. It would betray the confidence of Peer and cut across his expressed wishes;
2. It would be a self-serving action -- impetus should come from Ambassador Taylor;
3. It might be grabbed upon prematurely and unjudiciously by policy makers now groping for a solution and thereby turn "McNamara's War" into "McCone's War."



Marshall S. Carter
Lieutenant General, USA
Deputy Director

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MSC:blp

Distribution:

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16 NOV 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

VIA

: Deputy Director for Plans [REDACTED]

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SUBJECT

: Saigon Station Experiment in Counterinsurgency

1. This memorandum is for the information of the Director.
2. Attached hereto is a copy of a teletape dispatch received from Mr. Peer De Silva, Chief of Station, Saigon, dated 6 November 1964. This dispatch outlines an experiment undertaken since early summer of this year in [REDACTED] in northeast South Vietnam designed to achieve a new admixture of intelligence gathering, civic action and psychological warfare conducted by small well trained teams.
3. The results of this experiment are impressive. From one team numbering 40 persons, the project has been expanded to five teams of approximately equal size within [REDACTED]. The success of these teams is attributed to the fact that they have well ingratiated themselves to the local populations and have generated thereby the protection of the population and tactical intelligence used in their own operations as well as other operations conducted by the province and district chief. Significantly, the MACV sector advisors have stated that they consider these teams the only effective popular forces in the province, and they were most enthusiastic concerning the present teams and an expansion of the experiment under station control.
4. Since mid-summer, the first three of these teams have killed 167 VC, captured 236 others and also captured a large number of weapons, unfortunately not specified. Losses of these teams have been six killed, 22 wounded in action, none missing in action and no desertions.
5. In large measure, the success of the operation derives from an effective and intelligent use of the teams by the province chief and his subordinate district chiefs.

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6. Ambassador Taylor has been briefed on this experiment as well as on its possible expansion. The Ambassador enthusiastically supports the idea and its growth. Ambassador Johnson was so interested in Mr. De Silva's account of this activity, he was scheduled to visit the site of the project on 7 November.

7. The significance of this pilot model operation lies not only in the modest success it has achieved, but also in providing an alternative to the very serious options being considered by American policy makers at this time. This experiment is not an isolated example, since other small teams have similarly proved themselves in action in Vietnam. However, Mr. De Silva specifically asks that this example not be used in policy councils in Washington at this time for fear of embarrassment of the entire project before it has some chance to grow and improve itself. Present plans call for the expansion of the experiment [redacted] The Division has indicated to Mr. De Silva its enthusiasm for this project and willingness to support it in any feasible way.

/s/ William E. Colby

William E. Colby
Chief, Far East Division

cc: DDCI

Attachment: 1

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SUBJECT: Our [] Experiment and Its Implications

1. As earlier reporting will indicate, we have, since early summer, been engaged in an experiment [] concerned with a new approach to the problem of combining the functions of intelligence gathering, civic action, and psywar action and imposing these on small, heavily-armed and specially trained teams capable of taking offensive action against comparable VC units in their home districts. There have been developments in this experiment that are significant, and I wish to tell you about them, for the present for your information only and without intending any action on your part.

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2. Back in April of this year the police chief [] sought American assistance for a special team he had gathered of some 35 persons who seemed to be well motivated and willing to show some aggressiveness against VC elements in the district. We gave this person some help in the form of small arms; and a local []

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[] generally under [] supervision, gave further help in devising thorough and detailed training schedules with heavy emphasis on motivation.

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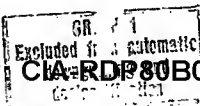
3. This first team, [] was raised in that district and operates only in that district. The training of this first team, which finally comprised 40 people who were in fact taken from the ranks of the local Popular Forces, was actually carried out by three selected Vietnamese who followed the training material prepared by the American group. As a consequence, a gradually increasing body of teachers and trainers has been created along with the generation of additional teams which now number five.

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4. A word now about the Popular Forces [] who in general follow the "concept" devised in Saigon and principally by MACV as being the role of Popular Forces throughout the country as a whole; that is, Popular Force elements should be based on the village unit, and should be completely defensive in orientation, armed with shotguns and carbines as available, with minimal training to match.

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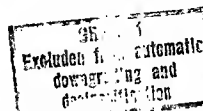
25X1 From the outset, [] plus the subsequent teams was recruited and trained for a different complex of purposes. They are, in the first instance, to be recruited and based in the district as a unit, and were to be aggressive against VC influence and personnel in their districts, short of taking on VC main force units or large formations beyond their capability. Coordination between district chiefs under whose directions these teams operate (under the over-all supervision of the province chief) would take care of the problem of VC slipping back and forth from one district to another.

25X1 5. In addition to this basic difference from the regular Popular Forces concept (district based and aggressive rather than village based and defensive) the [] team was, as I mentioned earlier, given intensive motivational training, to include training carrying out civic action activities among the people of their district. By their comportment and actions they are to win the cooperation and confidence of the families in their district among whom they operated, and were to seek intelligence from them concerning VC cadres, VC units passing through, tax collectors, plus any other info concerning armed VC units in or passing through the district. To the limit of their capability, they are to set their own ambushes based on this intelligence and to engage the VC. For this purpose, this first 40-man team was given the following armament which we supplied: three bars, nine M-1 rifles, 25 submachine guns, 17 pistols plus assorted grenades and grenade launchers.

6. As a record of performance of the first three teams so generated, trained, and equipped, since mid-summer these three teams killed 167 VC and captured 236 others, with a high proportion of weapons captured. The losses of these three teams have been six killed, 22 wounded in action, four weapons lost in action, and - please note this well - none missing in action and no desertions

25X1 7. I finally got up to [] last Monday, 2 November, to examine this activity at first hand. I took with me [] 25X1 [] principally because he has in all respects been helpful and it was clear to me that USOM was going to be heavily involved in subsequent modification of the present Popular Forces concept which I shall touch on later in this dispatch. Accompanied by [] 25X1 [] dropped in on the MACV Sector Advisor, a Major Haskell and his deputy, a Major Osborn. I had already heard in Saigon from MACV

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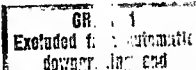
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25X1 that the Popular Forces throughout the northern provinces were just about worthless, so it came as no surprise when Major Haskell confirmed this view in answer to my question. We agreed that the security situation [] had been rapidly deteriorating to the point where the great bulk of the province is ~~not~~ either under tight VC control or is unsafe for any GVN presence except strong arms formations of which there presently are none. I asked the MACV Advisor his opinion of these experimental teams, and he and his assistant stated flatly that they are the only Popular Force units of any value whatsoever, and that they are in fact highly successful and highly respected. I cannot emphasize too strongly the enthusiasm these two advisors showed for the spirit and accomplishments of these experimental teams. Major Haskell went so far as to say that the secure situation [] city itself is located was due principally to the activities of the [] team. Remember, this is a unit of 40 persons.

25X1 8. In answer to my questions, Major Haskell stated that the formation of these teams took nothing away from MACV, did not cause MACV any inconvenience or problem; on the contrary, their creation, operation and existence were the only bright spot in armed action against the VC throughout all of Quang Ngai province, at least so far as the Popular Forces was concerned. He and his assistants urged we do all we could to generate more such teams pointing out that MACV had nothing to offer in this regard.

25X1 9. From the Advisor's office, I went across to call on the province chief, [] who has been one of the moving forces in this activity since his arrival in the province in June 1964. He was born in the province and spent most of his life there and knows it well. I was impressed [] with his enthusiasm and intimate knowledge of the teams, their work and above all, the motivational factors which lie behind their success to date. I might at this point just mention exactly what these factors are: in the first place, the intimate and personalized training, and its content on the motivational side; in addition, 200 piastres extra per month per man; also, heavy fire power and many automatic weapons; also, uniforms; also, assured help for their families if they are killed, and opportunities to visit their families approximately on a monthly basis.

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10. Major Ly expounded on these matters at length covering much of the ground already explained to me by Teague and our other officers. As Major Ly's guest, I then went with him down into Tu Nghia district to the district chief's compound, a very modest and rustic layout. There the Tu Nghia team was drawn up for inspection. This was the original team, and they were very impressive in appearance. They were on the whole young, alert and obviously a proud unit, their clothes and equipment worn but clean. I spent some time there talking to the unit commander and the district chief before returning to Quang Ngai.

11. After lunch, the district chief used two of his own helicopters to take us and his armed escort down into Nghia Hanh district, where I was to see another team at work. After landing, and in an armed convoy, we drove about five kilometers back into the district. From where we finally stopped, we walked through the woods and fields about another kilometer to a collection of huts where a group of families lived. This was not a hamlet.

12. At this location, the team, its members wearing their black cotton uniforms, was scattered around in groups of two or three, depending on the location of family dwellings in that immediate area. The ones I saw were making thatching and repairing roofs on two or three family houses next to each other; nearby another small group was preparing a path and cleaning a well. Another member of the team was giving haircuts to some children (hair clippers by courtesy of CIA) and in all cases these young team members had local inhabitants sitting or squatting near them chatting. I was told that a team would spend one or two or possibly three days and nights in such an environment, and then move on a few kilometers to another settlement where their activities would be repeated. In this fashion they moved constantly through the district and very often returning to the same households. They slept in these households and were fed by the households in return for payment. At night, they provide their own perimeter security and set ambush teams; and very frequently, based on information coming from the households, they would set a more formal ambush for VC elements known or expected to pass through the area. If they could handle the VC force, they would take it on themselves. If they could not handle it, they would pass the word back to district headquarters.

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25X1 for other action. Key to all this, of course, was the fact that these teams were welcomed in these districts by the inhabitants who sheltered, protected and volunteered information about the VC. The district chief told me that two of the outlying district chiefs had written to him, having heard of these teams, and are asking that training and equipment be given teams in their districts and they would pay them. Riding back [] I learned from the district chief and the province chief that none of these teams had a barracks, or a compound, or in fact any specific place to which they would customarily return as a unit (I have explained this to Westmoreland, who does not understand it, nor the principle that these teams elect their own leader, as they in fact do). The way it works is this: during the course of the month, four or five team members are let go for four or five days to visit their own families. They take their weapons and equipment with them and on the conclusion of their leave, search out their team and rejoin it. Meanwhile, the team carries on as I have described above spending a day or two or three in one area and then moving on to another, but always living with the people, working with them, and getting information from them. Using the intelligence they so obtain, they will frequently mount an operation themselves against a VC element, probably under the supervision of the district chief himself. They of course provide intelligence on which other operations are based, not involving themselves.

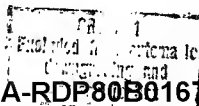
25X1 13. Before leaving [] and at [] repeated request, we agreed to train four more teams and simultaneously to train three more teams of instructors, hopefully to complete this by the end of next month. This is the limit of our capability at this point, the limiting factor being the degree of intimacy required in the training. We are here in Saigon now discussing using a team of potential trainers from [] provinces to send them to [] to be trained, as additional teams are trained for use in [] then to return them to their home provinces and attempt to transplant the principle and the purpose.

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14. I have briefed Ambassador Taylor on this matter and have found him enthusiastic in support. In much greater detail I have talked to Ambassador Johnson and in fact am taking him and [] on an unheralded repeat visit to [] this Saturday, 7 November,

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to see and hear what was shown and told me during my visit. I am doing this not only to expose Ambassador Johnson to the experiment, but to reinforce a point I have been making to him and to the Mission council concerning its significance in its relationship to the Popular Forces. I shall treat on this rather broader subject in a subsequent dispatch to you. At this time, I simply wanted to let you know of these developments, which unfortunately have been rather lengthy in narrative. I know they are important, however, and I believe you will find the next dispatch both useful and provocative.

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Peer De Silva

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